

# THE ADVOCATE

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## Groups: Species at risk, need help

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Seven environmental groups filed a petition with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service on Tuesday requesting Endangered Species Act protection for 404 different species of animals in the southeastern United States.

Included in the petition are 26 species found in Louisiana, such as the Eastern black rail, the Calcasieu crayfish, the Louisiana eyed silkmoth and the Pascagoula map turtle.

"They're species that we identified based on organizations that have identified them as being in peril," said Noah Greenwald, endangered species program director with the Center for Biological Diversity. "For aquatic biodiversity, the Southeast is just unparalleled."

However, it's also a region that has seen a lot of extinction, Greenwald said.

"Overall, the Mobile Basin is home to half of all North American species that have gone extinct since European settlement," he wrote in a news release.

The petition was filed by the

Center for Biological Diversity, the Gulf Restoration Network, of New Orleans, Alabama Rivers Alliance, Clinch Coalition, Dogwood Alliance, Tennessee Forests Council and West Virginia Highlands Conservancy.

Focused on freshwater species, the petition includes Louisiana, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee, Alabama, Georgia, Florida, Kentucky, South Carolina, North Carolina, Virginia and West Virginia.

"The projected extinction rate for U.S. freshwater animals is five times that of terrestrial animals, and is comparable to the extinction rate for tropical rainforests (Herrig and Shute 2002)," the petition says. "Nowhere is this extinction crisis more apparent than in the southeastern United States where the combination of an incredibly rich fauna, pervasive threats and few existing protections are leading to the demise of hundreds of aquatic species."

Valerie Fellows, a spokeswoman with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, said the agency has 90 days to review the petition to decide. She said she couldn't confirm the agency had received the petition Tuesday.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service then needs to decide if there is

substantial information and that a listing "may be" warranted. If there is substantial information that a listing may be needed, the agency needs to make a finding within a year of receiving the petition whether a listing is or is not needed.

If it's determined that a listing is needed, a proposed listing for the species can be made which involves more steps and additional review.

Another option is that the species can be move to a "warranted but precluded" category.

This means that there's information that a species should be listed, but there are other species that are a higher priority. If this is the case, the species' status is re-evaluated every year, according to information Fellows provided.

Greenwald said the entire process to decide whether a species should be listed or not should take about two years, although it sometimes takes longer.

"We're hoping to work on this with them," he said.

The petition and other information is available on the Center for Biological Diversity's website at <http://www.biologicaldiversity.org/>.